the TOWER

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the

TOWER

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in dedication to Dr. Sidney Vance

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MAX CASSADY

RAINY MONDAY

I wonder about that trashman
With his corduroy face
Wiped clean of emotion
His color seems outdone,
Though in only greys
His face would be as permanent
As Rushmore granite.

Untitled

Susie R. Hays

KRISTIN LAMBERTH

THE SOUTH

I

A plantation, rising tall and graceful
  amidst an emerald lawn
The air filled with the perfume of
  magnolias and jasmine
The landscape splashed with the
  purples and pinks
Of wisteria and lilacs
Surrounded by a sea of snowy cotton
  reaching as far as the eye can see
Small black figures dot the fields
  patiently plucking the fluffs off the stalks
The Southland of days long past
  vanished
Leaving only memories . . .

II

A small, cramped shack, aged
  with weather and time
Squatting in a yard of clay earth
An old disabled wagon sits patiently
  a broken wheel nearby
A farmer, the mark of years
  lines his face and hands,
As he plods behind his mule
  the sun beats down without mercy on his back
The cottonseed may not grow next year -
But on and on he slowly goes
  for this his life
The only one he knows . . .

III

A cabin, wind whistles through cracks
  dirt for the floor, cold and damp
Odors of food and other human smells
  smells seep into the walls, quilts, air
Permeating everything, forever
The people of this hovel not treated as such
  but only common property to buy and sell
Transplanted from home to a world
  hostile, uncaring, frightening
Forced to work in fields day after day
  labor neverending
Mercy does not come, freedom yet far away . . .

IV

Sunlight glints off a metal monster
  eating its way through the field
The farmer sits high in the driver's seat
  cooled by the air-conditioning
Listening to the radio
He does not grow the white cotton of old
  cattle dot the meadows where only
Cotton used to be -
The Southland of old, gone forever
  only memories remain . . .

JACQUILINE WEE

LONG AGO

Somewhere between my
glass of wine and
your cigarette,
the hovering curtain finally
fell.

The ghosts of our
pasts filtered through
the haze of our pretenses
and covered us with
sticky memories of
long ago.
Like little boxes sealed with
Pandora's mistakes, they
opened slowly . . .

Your eyes had nothing to say
and they made mine look away -
only to see those ghosts more clearly.

The ghosts smiled thinly.
They flung me
into the debris of your ashes,
sweeping me into a corner
and fitting me in the niche
where I used to belong
long ago.

WORLDS

Living in a two way
mirror reflecting
the past,
pantomiming the present,
I left traces of myself
with the fallen acorns and dogwood petals;
traces that slowly withered
and whispered with the
Spring, being mildly warmed
away by Summer
in bright light.

But here my damp hair dries
quickly in this equatorial heat
and outside, the mango tree looks ready
to bear fruit the colour of
sunset flames.
Bits of culture and tradition, long put away,
assault my five senses
familiarly.
Strangely.

With every smell and taste
my mind swoops in
remembrance of the
chinese fishing boat, glimpsed
fleetingly -
and I realize
how far away
you are
capsuled in time.

CONVERSATION

a little blue room
filled with smoke from
Marlboro chimneys,
is where they talk
in the dark
to each other.

Both have dreams
that glow
like the orange tip
of their cigarettes.
They talk continuously
till they discover
with mild surprise,
that outside the window
the light
has pushed the night
under the cover
of another day.

DANNY GAMBLE

BOHEMIAN NIGHTMARE

Crouching in the shadows
of pop aristocracy,
a lone gunman
lives his life of
adolescent turmoil.
Closing his eyes,
he empties his chamber
into the body of the poet.

Watercolors,
oils,
silkscreens,
line the walls of
hospital lobbies
and the vaults
of industrialists' mausoleums

Border patrols,
herbicides,
AWACS,
fashion
the sensimilla millionaire

In a Mississippi hovel
an Eastern exile
points his toe
in the third position
while he eats his bread and cheese
dreaming
of a free St. Petersburg.

The syndicated media
pours music
from a can.
Ad men dictate sound
while Schlitz rocks America.

DONNA LOIS CARTER

MERRY-GO-ROUND

Will there ever
be an end to this
merry-go-round ride

I mean I'm really tired
of seeing you
on your high horse
always by my side

But just
a little ahead
it seems

Your horse is prettier than mine
But this mare's solid
And yours is as hollow
as your heart

And this mare's smart
She won't jump too high
Without cause

But when she does
Man, when she does

REBECCA OWENS

MORNING MEDITATIONS

Steamy droplets softly pounding;
There's a new ring.
I wonder what he's doing?
New shampoo; smells nice.
Does he still love me?
Hot water's running out.
New spot of mold in the corner.
Why is he still seeing her?
All these tangles . . .
  all **these** tangles.
    Time to rinse.

AVIS M. RICHARDSON

NATURE'S RAREST GIFT

A perfect lady, nature's rarest gift to man, most treasureable treasure of man, and jealously envied by her fellow woman. This precious fruit, perfectly ripened with unselfish sweetness, is as beautiful as a Spring bouquet. Her sophisticated delicacy is as delicate as the petals of a precious Black Rose . . . Nature's Rarest Gift . . .

Rose *Avis M. Richardson*

LEIGH BAILEY

SINNER

You said you'd never leave me.
And, I know that it was true,
For I was the one who walked away.
I looked back over my shoulder and
  saw you standing there.
With tears in your eyes you watched me leave.
I knew I put those tears there,
But, who cared? I surely didn't.
I can see now how very wrong I was to leave you --
  I never should have gone.
I was the one who walked away and
  left you all alone.
If only I could come back to you;
  but I really don't know how.
If I get down on my knees,
  will you forgive me . . .

And wipe my tears away?

MY FINAL ESSAY

Sitting in the classroom
Trying to compose my final essay
I look out the window to see leaves falling from the trees,
Realizing that I am a lot like those leaves,
Placed haphazardly by the wind,
With no particular place to go
But infinite ways to get there.

DENISE MEREDITH

SOON THE HOWLING WIND

Soon there will be no butterflies,
And soon the wind will howl
Through the trees and meadows,
And chase away the fowl.
The leaves will glow with splendor
Of the colors autumn knows,
As trees whisper tales of bygone years
In mystical wintry groves.
The days will slowly darken
As night extends its hours,
And snow glides ever silently
To blanket all the flowers.
From stream to sea the ice will be
A bridge of crystal magic,
As silver moonbeams fall upon
A woodsman with his hatchet.

JENNIFER LANGLEY

RAINBOWS

Scarlet stains are everywhere,
even on the whitest gowns.
Purple teardrops will fall tomorrow.
They are black in yesterday's secrets.
Blue understanding will flow from every heartbeat,
but only from the most sacred hearts.
Yellow is the fear that overtakes the children,
but still they venture far from home.
Orange rides a gallant horse,
but she is unsteady for the first time around.
Red glows the confidence that ignores the children,
still they must light the candle.
Mirages of rainbows fill her head in the desert,
they keep her alive until she finds the river.

My love for you fades sweetly into
melancholy laughter.

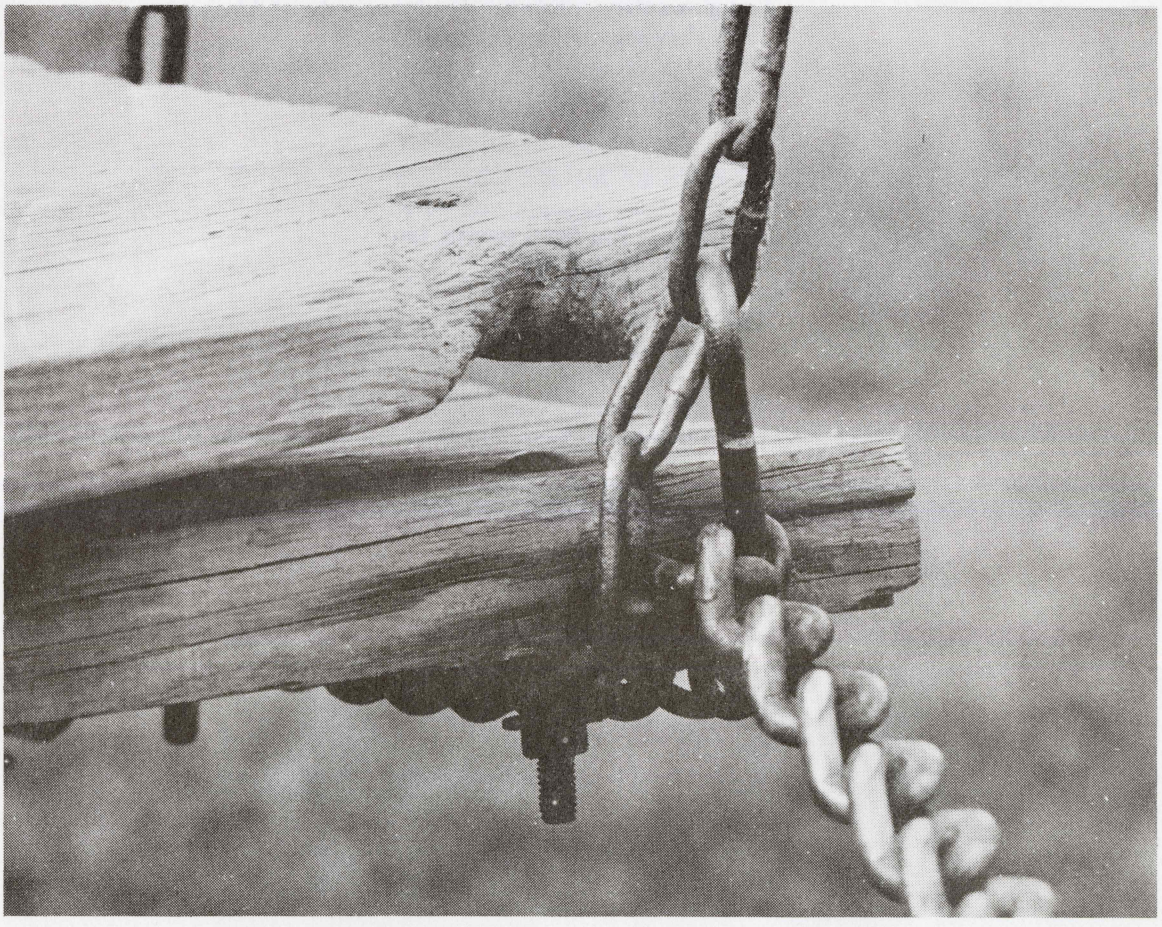
The tears I cry for you fall bravely
from a needing soul.

Beautiful colors are endlessly flowing
into painful understanding.

I am drowning, I hear betrayal
screaming.

Please, don't Judas me.

Cellophane eyes stare from a scarlet silence
they are as real as the promises
Metallic faces sing bittersweet lullabys
they are as loud as the heart beat
A plastic heart stares back at the eyes
they are dosed and the promises were broken
before they were made
A child listens to the lullabys,
and sleeps until yesterday.

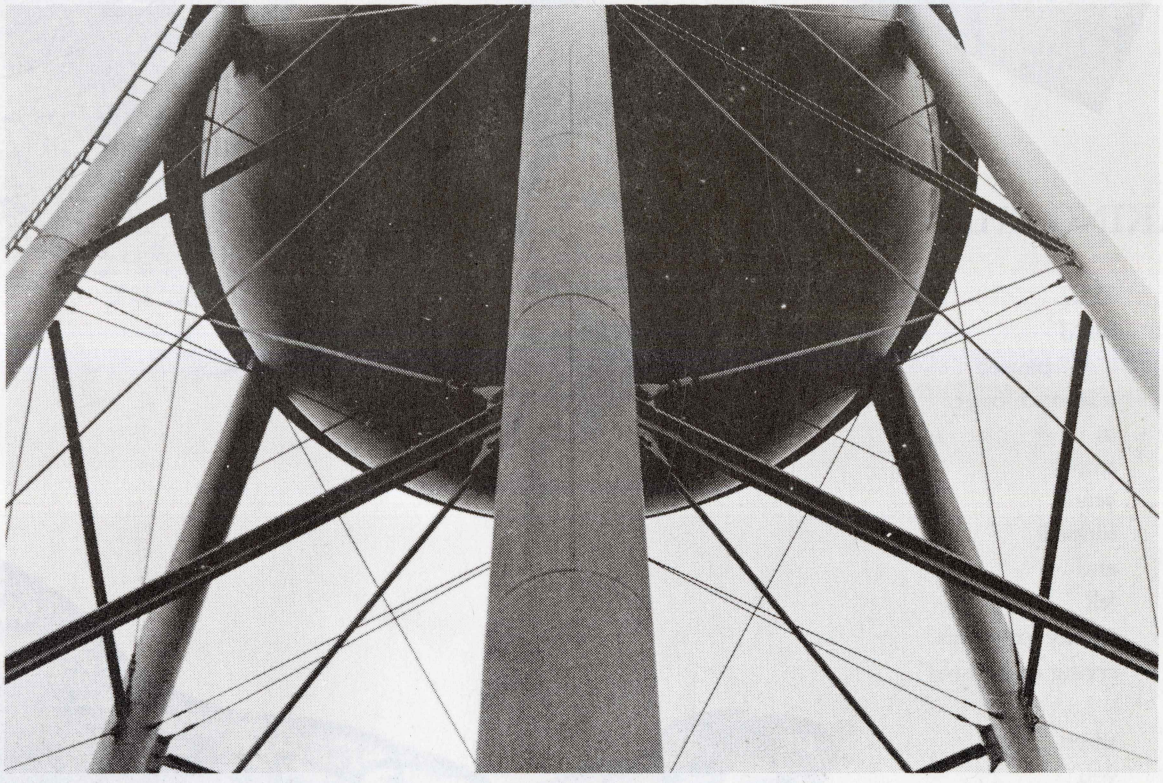


Untitled *Susie R. Hays*

STONEY BEAVERS

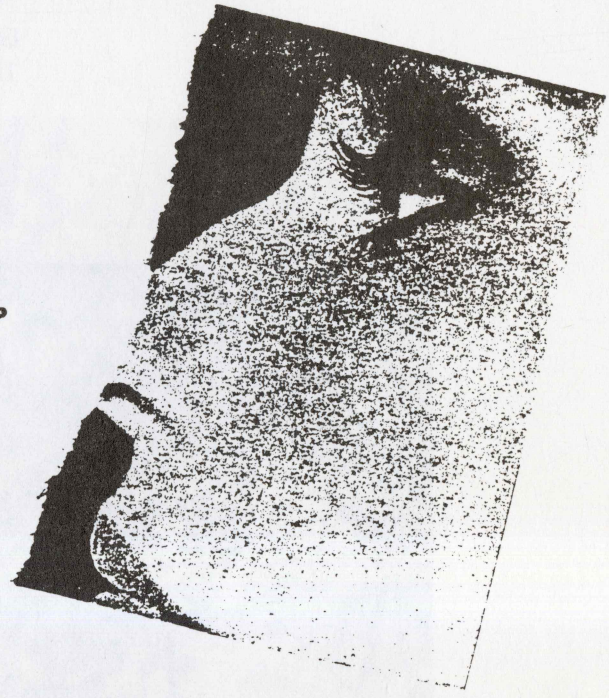
METALLIC

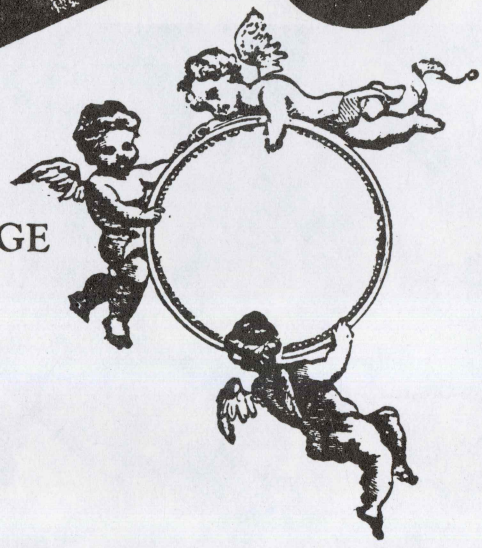
Men of chrome meet on a busy circuit.
There is no place for either to go.
As they stand, their eyes meet.
In the metallic body of the other,
They see themselves, tall and lean.
Emotion is born; they become one, and
The circuit shorts.



Tower

Avis M. Richardson

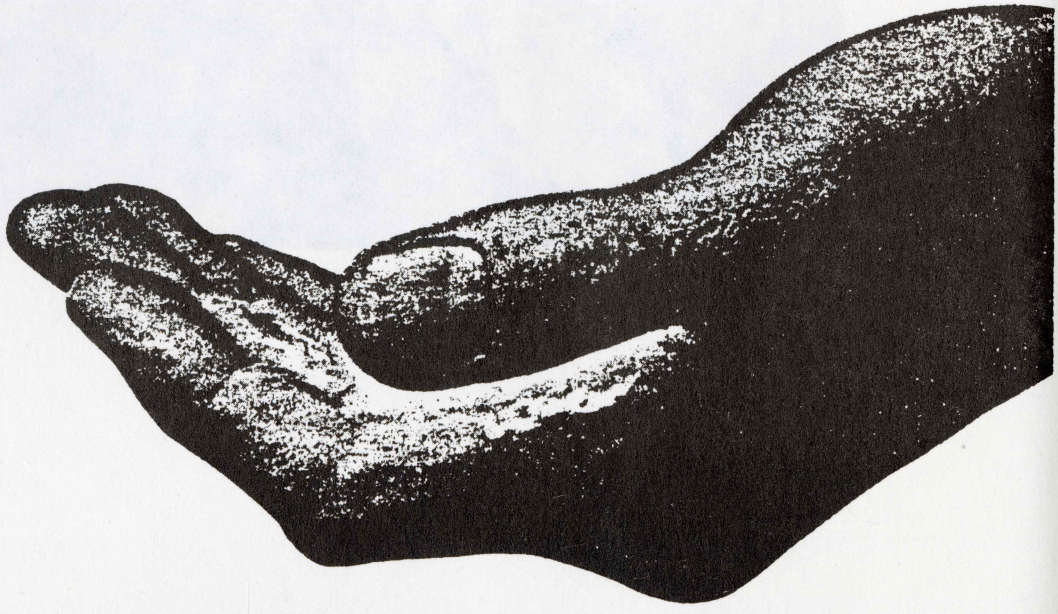




MAKING CHANGE

Your
hand
paused
a second longer
as
empty
years
slipped
and
fell
on my fingertips
crying to be held

when
you
made
change.



LISA F. NICHOLS

THE GAME

Alone at last,
Your mind runs wild.
To be near this man;
No longer a child.

To know the passion
held deep within,
You look at him;
He looks at you;
And gives a sultry grin.

You play the game,
You play it well.
You trust him,
He'll never tell.
The things you do,
The things you say;
Will only last for this
one day.

That's the way the game
is played,
All throughout the land,
And this game,
It has a name;
It's called a one-night
Stand.

MARGARET A. PURCELL

SOVEREIGNTY

I've learned to love the loneliness which lulls me
like a lance.
My sensing modes are severed, and my mind has been
entranced.
The hurt and scorn have seeped away and dulled my
senseless yearning.
I've come to know the wealth of me while you I am
unlearning.

BARBARA DELKER

HORIZONS

Blue staring at blue
Glassy top facing
Empty expanse - staring

Blue reaching up to touch blue
Stretching - pulling itself up to the task
Graying from the stress
    folding on itself
    staring again

Blue lowering arms to embrace blue
Bubbling up and spilling over
Filling and over flowing
    dropping to fall
    touching at last

Starburst — *Avis M. Richardson*

R. MARIAN OAKES

ON THIS STAGE
(With apologies to Shakespeare)

"I cannot heave my heart
[or is it my mind?] into
my mouth [or should I say pen?]"

Words flow from my pen
  of their own accord, uninhibited;
I can't dictate what
  appears on the paper -
  can't control my pen
  (or is it my mind?)

Shakespeare, why do you reign
  o'er this stage, when you
  yourself said we were all players -
And who is that waiting
  in the wings -
  waiting, questioning whether
  to play his role or not -

But the words continue
  to flow from my pen,
  appearing on the paper
  instead of only in my
  mind (or is it my heart?)

And all I can do is play
out my role on a
stage that's been set.

Choice

Susie R. Hays

MARCIA MECHLER

WITHOUT TITLE

the bottle lies
empty at the foot of the stairs
carelessly cast aside
with tomorrow's dreams
in today's trash.
Love pleads, he swears
he can quit anytime
he wants to but
he never wants to.
Making the same mistakes
but expecting different results -
he drowns the problems and feels their emergence
in the distant morning, gathering force
like a snowball rolling down a hill
until it hits bottom
and crushes the tiny tree
beneath.
Watching a family tear apart
from inches of insanity
is not a very revolutionary act.

SIGN OF THE TIMES

We were all invited to share eternity
In one place beyond imagination
A huge banquet in a house of many mansions
And a promise of everlasting life was
Included in the deal.

I arrived at the house at the appointed hour
And the sign on the door read: Cancelled
due to
lack of
interest.

20th CENTURY PANTHEON(S)

Look how,
where we worship
We honor
And praise our gods;
The hierarchy of priority
Excuses the shadows (and traces
the vague generalities)
With inconspicuous
Subleties . . .
Lucifer in the garden
Of cinemas.

KELLY LAWHON

FAMILY

We exist
  in the same household --
But are we together?
Do we really know
  these people
  with whom we have lived
  our entire lives?
They've seen our worst
  and our best.
But we each
  go our own way
And the little things
  are lost.
We don't even
  spend time together
  anymore.
Our major form of communication
  is leaving notes
  on the refrigerator door.

JERRI BUCKINGHAM

LIFE IN SEASON

Dandelion
Sandy day
Hilltop dances
Silent way
Years of searching
Winding path
Climb the system
Watch them laugh
Soft surprises
Shadow song
Mistress answer
All along
Hope soars freely
Winds of time
Changes dreaming
Pantomime
One more answer
No more reason
Running backwards
Life in season.

CAROUSEL

A carousel
Sitting on a hill,
Abandoned.
Charging horses,
Necks
Fiercely arched -
Chipped paint.
Running horses,
Legs held high -
Broken glass
From lightbulbs.
Another falls.
Mirrors,
Cracked,
Broken.
No more music.
A left-over toy.
Sad eyes,
Stillness.
The horses seem
To wait.
The children
Have all gone,
Laughing faces,
Loving touches,
The forgotten fantasy.
Here they wait,
Frozen,
Statues,
Maybe the children
Will come again.

GINA RENEE PALMER

TO THE STRONGER BRETHREN

You regard my God like a Hindu idol,
A twisted and grotesque figure
With multiple heads, spider-like arms,
And covered with a gleaming gilt
That chills your bones, even as I sigh of its beauty.
Yet, it is the same God. He answers to the same name.

Upon a heart of stone,you say, I have carved this image
By my own will and so I have.
His arms are rigid, yet they have comforted me.
Though his eyes seem to stare coldly, they have carefully,
If solemnly, watched me from the womb and guided me
Through the heavens and hells of this earth.
You say that you see no tenderness in Him,
Because His mouth is as harsh and hardset as my own.
Yet, He has spoken wisdom in my daylight
And sung to gentle sleep my fear of the night.
Our God came to you in your joy and to me in my strife.
Thus, we sculpted His appearance with the chisel of circumstance.

You clutch your favorite -ism in the hand you extend to me,
Labeling any variance of opinion as heresy.
Do not say my God is not real for being different.
Just say the Spirit is like the tongues of a flame:
Though the same substance, its form changes
Every time it leaps toward Heaven.

Waiting

Avis M. Richardson

TOO OLD WOMEN

Two old women, sister and I try to pretend
We do not see the blood veins showing Siberian blue
Under the thin, white skin of the other's trembling hands.
Painfully clutching our coffee cups,
We gaze into one another's souls with averted eyes.
The young would never believe that she -
Whose rough, waxy, pale flesh is stretched out upon her
Bones like death enveloping - once possessed long auburn hair
Which tumbled down upon soft and sensual shoulders.
To young women it does not seem possible
That sister was a goddess in 1924.

To old women my face and eyes
Contain the mirrors that confirm their fears
That our shared yesteryears, those colorfilled captured
Glimpses of memory, are slowly fading into greys and whites
And disappearing into the echoing darkness of "I remember . . .".

Too old women - the church door is heavier now
Than it was when we entered it as bride
Or mother of the christening child or voice for the choir.
For how soon will the next time be
That I pass through these doors without effort
To waiting flowers and songs sung just for me?
When the young priest prays and sister weeps
What ceremony do you think that will be?
But this is the fate left to old women,
  we two old women,
  we too old women.

MARY BETH KEENUM

THE BABY OF THE FAMILY

Today's my birthday. They think I don't remember, but I do. Ruth's in the kitchen right now making me a cake. Chocolate with strawberry cream icing. That's what she makes me every time -- chocolate cake with strawberry icing -- even though she knows I don't like it. I creep to the kitchen door to hear what she's telling Kathleen. Maybe they'll talk about my birthday present.

"You'd think Connie might have made the effort to come down for Molly's birthday," Ruth is fussing as she stirs the chocolate cake batter. "It's not as if she sees Molly very often. Goodness, the last time she was down here was the week before Christmas, and she didn't even stay two days then."

I remember that. For Christmas Connie gave me a book with a green cover and no pictures. I didn't read it though. Kathleen and Ruth took it, and Kathleen explained that it was too hard for me and I really wouldn't understand it.

"You'd think she'd feel a family responsibility to come back for her own sister's birthday," Ruth continues. "What does she do up there all the time?"

"Well, she does have a family of her own," Kathleen says wistfully. I know why. It's because of the Miscarriage. They think I don't know about it, but I do.

"We're her family too," Ruth snaps back. "If she hadn't married someone from out-of-town, she wouldn't be neglecting her obligations to us."

"Remember her wedding?" Kathleen sighs. "So pretty. Like mine . . ."

I can tell they aren't going to talk about my birthday present anytime soon, so I go on back to the living room and sit down in the rocker. It's a big wooden rocker with a rose brocade seat. If I sit back, just the tips of my toes touch the cabbage rose rug. I rock and watch the birds through the window. One especially playful robin flutters in and out of the ivy hanging down from the porch roof.

The telephone rings. I don't answer it because I'm scared of telephones. Kathleen comes in from the kitchen to answer it. I think it's Frank, because I hear Kathleen say to be over here at six o'clock, and Frank and Lou always come over for my birthday dinner.

Frank Riley's my brother. Ruth Riley's my sister. I'm the baby of the family. Connie and Kathleen are my sisters too, even though they have different last names. That's because they're married. Kathleen lives with us, because she won't get a divorce. So Connie and Kathleen aren't Riley anymore, but they're still family. Lou's a Riley, but she's really not family. She used to be someone else. I don't want to change my name ever. Riley--wily--guily. It's funny how you can take a familiar word and say it over and over until it doesn't sound familiar anymore. Riley--Riley--Riley--Do people make names or do names make people? Riley--Riley--

I get up and go get an oatmeal cookie without raisins from the cookie jar on the breakfast room table. The lunch dishes are still on the table. Ruth's so busy with my cake, she hasn't cleared them yet. I go back to Ruth's bedroom. She has the downstairs room. Kathleen and I have to sleep upstairs.

I look around Ruth's room. Same as usual. On her bedside table is the crystal hourglass the Women's Club gave her for -- I look at the inscription -- "25 years of dedication and inspiration to us all." She always says that was a foolish thing for them to give her, because what did she want with an hourglass? "Some flighty notion of that Mrs. Berkhold who thinks she got culture in Boston," Ruth would sniff. But she's proud of that hourglass. When she thinks no one is looking, she picks it up and plays with it and reads the inscription.

There's a picture on her wall above the table. Actually it's four pictures -- one of each of us sisters. Each picture is in its own cardboard oval so that we're all in the same frame but separate. Ruth's picture's first, I guess because she's the oldest. Mama called her the smart one, but I think she's the bossy one. But I don't tell her that. Kathleen's next. Mama called her the pretty one. Then Connie. Mama called her the independent one. And me, the baby of the family.

I look at Connie's picture again. I'm glad Connie's not coming for my birthday. She isn't nice to me like everybody else. Mostly she just ignores me, but one time when I told her I wanted a glass of orange Kool-Aid, she got upset. She screamed at me and said I was a disgrace and why did I let them treat me like this. Later I heard her talking to Ruth and Kathleen. She said they spoiled me and I was lazy and selfish and she didn't see how they put up with me. Then she said thank God she got away from here because otherwise she might have ended up like me. I'm the reason she won't visit here much.

Kathleen's coming in here to take me upstairs so I can get dressed for my birthday dinner. We go upstairs slowly. She lets me go first. My room's the first one on the right at the top of the stairs. It's the pink room with the eyelet ruffled curtains. I sit down on my bed and hold Baby Babs, the doll I got last birthday, while Kathleen gets out my clothes.

"I want to wear my yellow dress," I say. I like it. My yellow dress has a nice full skirt that flares out when I spin around.

"Wouldn't you rather wear your pink one with the ruffles, dear?" coaxes Kathleen.

"My yellow dress," I insist, holding Baby Babs tight so her pink lacy bonnet tickles my nose.

"Come on now, you look so pretty in pink." Kathleen takes the pink dress out of the closet. I consider throwing a temper tantrum, but since it's my birthday, I don't. Kathleen takes Baby Babs out of my arms and turns me around so she can undo the row of buttons down my back. Then she holds out the pink dress for me to put on. After I get it on, I'm glad I'm wearing it. It's pretty.

I like my clothes. Every summer and winter, a lady comes to measure me. Later she brings back clothes that fit me. I don't know how she knows what to make. I guess Ruth and Kathleen tell her. Once she asked me what kind of dressses I wanted. I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything. She doesn't ask me anymore.

I put on my pink shoes that match the dress. Kathleen pulls out the hairbrush and pink hair ribbon. She's ready to brush my hair. I have to sit down again, because I'm taller than she is. She ties the ribbon into a big bow, and we go back downstairs to wait for Frank and Lou.

Da-da-da-da...da-da. That's Frank's knock at the door. Kathleen runs to answer it, and Frank and Lou come in. They're all dressed up in their Sunday clothes, and Lou smells of flowers. She tells me how pretty I look in my pink dress, but she really think it's silly, Ruth and Kathleen having to look after a big girl like. "Slow," that's how she describes me to Frank. She thinks I don't hear her, but I do.

Frank slips Ruth a pretty box wrapped in flowered paper so she can hide it in the kitchen until dinner's over. It's for me. They think I don't notice, but I do. I don't say anything though. That would spoil the surprise.

We talk for a few minutes. Then we all sit down at the table, and Ruth and Kathleen bring in the food. I sit and eat my chicken and stare at the vase of pink flowers in the middle of the table. Nobody says much but Ruth. She's complaining about the delivery boy from the grocery. He didn't come today.

Finally we finish eating. Ruth brings in the chocolate with the strawberry cream icing. She's swirled the frothy icing so the cake looks like it's smothered in pink lace. I try to look surprised while they sing Happy Birthday to me. Then we all have cake. I don't eat much of mine, but Ruth doesn't notice. Everyone else finishes, and Ruth brings in the birthday presents.

First I open the one from Frank and Lou. It's a little china box shaped like a heart, with roses painted on the lid. "To keep jewelry in," Lou explains, as if I don't know that.

Next Ruth hands me a square box wrapped in white tissue tied with a pink yarn bow. It's from Kathleen. I tear off the wrapping paper. It's a book -- **Peter Pan** -- with a pretty picture on the cover. Then I pick up a package wrapped in brown paper. I look at Ruth. She shakes her head. "It's from Connie," she says.

I peel off the brown paper and open the box. Inside, carefully cushioned in shredded newspaper, are a hand mirror and a gold tube. First I pick up the tube. I know it's a lipstick because I've seen Lou use hers before. I pull off the lid and twist the bottom to see what color comes up. It's red. Just then, Ruth notices what it is.

"Connie's sent her a lipstick," she screeches and snatches it away from me, smearing red on my fingers. She yells something else, but I don't listen. I'm looking in the little hand mirror. I don't have a mirror in my room, so I haven't looked in one in a long time.

"For goodness' sake, Ruth, what's wrong with her having a lipstick?" Lou asks.

"She doesn't need one," Ruth snaps.

"Ruth," Kathleen says softly, "I think - -"

"What?" Ruth stares at her, and she doesn't say anything else. Frank gets another piece of birthday cake.

"Ruth, you're being unreasonable. What's the harm in Molly's having a lipstick?" Lou says.

"It's red," Ruth answers disgustedly.

"So?" Lou arches her eyebrow. I peek in the mirror to see if I can do that.

Ruth narrows her eyes at Lou. "I don't want her to go around all made-up like some big-city girl who's lost all sense of propriety." She eyes Lou's rouged cheeks. "When I was growing up, we were taught better than that."

Lou is insulted. "Ruth Riley, be reasonable. That was years ago. **Nice** women wear rouge and lipstick now."

"I just don't believe it's right for Molly," Ruth tells her.

"Don't you think she's old enough to decide that for herself?" Lou demands.

I look up from the mirror. "How old am I?" I ask. Everyone hushes. They look at me, then away. "Ruthie?" I say. (She hates it when I call her that.) She doesn't say anything.

I get up from the table and go into Ruth's room. I look up at the picture of all of us on the wall, then down at the little silver mirror I have in my hand. I set the mirror down on the table by Ruth's little hourglass sitting in the middle of a lace doily. I pick up the hourglass and turn it upside down. The little white grains rush to go through the narrow opening and into the empty other side. Then I turn it back over, and the grains that already made it through have to start over again. I shake it so the grains go through faster, then set it back on the doily. I pull the doily across the table toward me. The little hourglass with its inscription facing me leans toward me, then falls on the floor.

Ruth is standing in the door, her mouth pinched. She walks over and looks at the broken pieces on the floor. The sand is scattered over the rug. Ruth looks at me. I leave and go up to my room. I sit on my bed and hold Baby Babs.

LEE FLOWERS

UNSOUGHT WISDOM

The sun peeked through the clouds, and even though the ground was still soggy from the previous night's rain, the day promised to be fit for Mrs. Mosely's second grade class Easter egg hunt. Tara had waited with anticipation; she loved egg hunts. At Brian's house, the scavengers were assembled in the driveway for the preliminary rules and remarks.

"There is a prize for the person who finds the golden egg," began Brian's mother.

"Now everyone be quiet and listen to your directions!" Mrs. Mosely shouted above the cheers.

"You'll have to look real hard for the golden egg ..."

"I see one!" someone yelled, pointing to an indiscreet, pink oval exposing itself on top of the grass.

Tara was embarrassed for the mother who had hidden that egg. Sadly enough, she thought, someone's mother had put that egg there thinking it would not be easily seen. And now here was a thoughtless blabbermouth announcing the visibility of it to everybody, before the hunt had even begun. She always wondered why the mothers would put so many of the eggs right on top of the grass when they should know that the purpose of Easter egg hunts is to have to look for the eggs and then find them, not to just pick them up and put them in your basket. They simply must be poor hiders.

". . . and none of them will be in the trees, so no climbing . . ."

She wondered if the eggs she would find today would be as pretty as the ones she had brought. As each participant had been instructed to bring six dyed hard-boiled eggs, yesterday she had prepared six works of art. Mother had boiled the eggs and added the vinegar and water to the dye tablets, but this year, Tara had done the rest all by herself. Well, Mother did help read the directions. But Tara had submerged the eggs into the coffee mugs (without cracking a single one), turned them over frequently so that no one portion would turn darker than the rest, and spooned them out at the precise moment, all with intense concentration. Envisioning each of them, she recalled the beautiful, smooth, purple one with the bright yellow flower decals.

" . . ., flower beds, and garbage cans are off limits. Okay? Go!"

And off they went, trampling one another, the already spotted pink trove their immediate destination. Tiny Marvin Tibit, who, for some reason, was not clobbered by the masses, trailed behind, running as fast as his little legs would carry him.

Tara, who refused to turn a dignified event into a road race, remained behind also. She tried to meander over to the opposite direction of Marvin in hopes that he would not accompany her. He's such an incompetent that she knew with him along, she would never get any eggs.

Brian beat the crowd to the first egg. Then others were spotted nearby, and the result was a chain of races, a crowd running to each egg. The grand shute continued in this fashion for awhile.

Meanwhile, by herself, Tara was plundering through the monkey grass, ivy, and shrubbery, efficiently storing her basket. One by one, each egg was a glorious find. She thought herself somewhat clever for using such strategy. When she stopped to assess her reapings, she counted eleven items: seven boiled eggs and four marshmallow ones. Filled with pride, she made one last scan over her little hunting site. Then she remembered last year.

Last year, at the Sunday school Easter egg hunt, she had made the mistake of letting her best friend, Stephanie (who, unlike Tara, was a poor hunter), search with her. To keep her friend happy, Tara had been forced to hand over some of her eggs.

Quickly, so that no one would see her, she slipped five of her eggs under the grass in her basket. With six showing in her basket, she thought, nobody would ask her to give any away.

She wondered if anyone had found her purple egg yet. She turned around to look in the baskets of the still savage stalkers. It was not to be seen. There was a voice from behind. "Tara?"

The sun went behind a cloud, and everything was dim. Tara saw and felt the wet soil squish between her feet and the soles of her sandals as she turned back around. It was Mrs. Mosely. Marvin was standing next to her. His basket was empty.

"Ooh! You've found lots of pretty eggs, haven't you?"

Tara did not like the way her teacher was smiling at her.

"One, two, three, four, five -- ohh, six eggs! You must be a good hunter!"

Marvin was just standing there. The way he looked always triggered a reflex in Tara that made her look at something else. Undoubtedly he had more cooties than all the other yuky boys in the class. He was just standing there, looking confused but content, yet looking at nothing; oblivious to his yukiness, and seemingly not feeling at all stupid to be holding an empty basket.

"Tara, would you like to share some of your eggs with Marvin, since he doesn't have any?"

What Tara resented most was the look on Mrs. Mosely's face. It was that You and I are pals, I'm not more powerful

than you, I know I can always depend on you, so I don't really have to ask, That's why I'm smiling look. It was the look that they use when they want something. And it was a lie.

Without hesitation, Tara placed two of her eggs in Marvin's basket. His face beamed. What a moron, she thought.

While Mrs. Mosely carried on about what a nice, generous person Tara was, Tara tried to peer into the baskets of as many as possible to see how many eggs the others had. It looked as though, with her nine eggs remaining, that she still might have a chance at the prize for the most eggs. How surprised they would all be when Brian's mother named her the winner! Hardly would they expect Tara, slow, quiet, and apparently uncaring, to have gathered more than they. And Mrs. Mosely would see her purple masterpiece in someone's basket and, holding it up for everyone to see, say, "Who did this one?" And Tara would modestly say nothing, but raise her hand, and everyone would stare at her. All train of thought was interrupted by the screeching shouts of Brian.

"I found it! I found it!"

Amidst the commotion, Tara learned that Brian had found the golden egg inside his father's barbecue grill. The barbecue grill. Honestly.

When all of the hunters had been reassembled on the patio and the mothers had gone around counting everyone's eggs, each hunter was instructed to put all of the eggs he had found into a large tub. Some carefully placed each individual egg into the collection. Others stood over the top of the tub and turned their baskets upside down. Watching the latter procedure, Tara witnessed something that made her palms clammy. It was her beautiful, purple egg; cracked and battered, it discharged white entrails in a sea of egg dye and cellophane.

Brian already was showing off his prize, a coupon for a free cheeseburger and french fries at Burger King. Apparently, the winner for the most eggs had not yet been announced.

She lost. Johnny Baker won, having ten eggs.

In years to come, Tara would remember what she learned on the day of her second grade class Easter egg hunt. If she told her story to others, the moral would have nothing to do with loving one's neighbor, sharing, or the golden rule. It was one that would take her friends years to believe, and for some, would never be believed at all. But then, they probably wouldn't want to know; it's easier not to.

ELLEN ARNOLD

CARMICHAEL LIBRARY AWARD FICTION, DIV. II

OF INNOCENCE AND EXPERIENCE

Strange things happen in life -- a ticket here, a ticket there, and twenty, thirty, forty years later the destination.

In his first novel, **Testing the Current** (Simon and Schuster, 1984), William McPherson shares some of the "tickets" that the eight-year-old hero, Tommy McAllister, has purchased during his short lifetime. Though the book spans little more than a year, it is during this critical year that Tommy learns some valuable facts of life, and we, in turn, are enlightened. To us, the novel itself is a ticket: a ticket back to the years of the Great Depression, back to the childhood of a very charming and clear-sighted little boy, and back to memories of our own childhoods.

Set in 1939, **Testing the Current** carries us through the experiences of a little boy growing up in the Midwest. Although it is the time of the Depression, Tommy's family has been spared the horrible reality which other families had to face. In fact, "Tommy's father had actually made money in the Depression -- somehow taken it out of the hole everyone else's was going into, Tommy supposed --and they were very fortunate." Tommy's world is one of champagne parties and train trips to Chicago and vacations at the country club.

But Tommy gradually recognizes, if only half-consciously, that the world extends beyond the narrow bounds of Grande Riviere, Wisconsin -- that there is much more to life than what he has experienced. He learns that his school friend, Bob Bonner, does not live in a comfortable house with polished floors and china cabinets, but in a cheap, second story apartment that smells of grease and has only a brittle linoleum rug to cover the floor. He learns that reality is sometimes harsh, as in the story which his aunt tells of her father, who deserted his family when she was still a small child:

> Tommy stood rapt, riveted to the spot and flooded with a sense of her loss . . . The enormous sadness of her story was like something out of a fairy tale, but it lacked a fairy tale ending. He waited for his aunt to supply one, and after a moment she resumed talking, but she was back on the subject of Jeff Steer.

Of course, there are problems involved in writing from a child's point of view. Minor problems materialize in the structure of the book -- a series of little episodes remembered from the past often presented in a stream of consciousness style. Tommy's memories and reflections do have the feeling of true recollection, but this structure is at times both difficult for McPherson to maintain and difficult for the reader to follow. Specifically, some of Tommy's expressions come out sounding less like an eight-year-old thinking out loud than an adult trying to relate the thoughts of an eight-year-old. One moment Tommy is asking the definition of "anarchy" and the next, McPherson is describing, through Tommy's eyes, Mrs. McAllister playing the piano with "poised" hands and "fingers tripping the cascade of sound." Likewise, the book's somewhat random organization sometimes makes it disjoined and confusing.

But these minor imperfections are easily dismissed; the overall effect of the book is both charming and eye-opening. As Russel Banks of the **New York Times Book Review** commented, "Mr. McPherson gives us the memories, dreams and reflections--all the data of a child's inner life'--without sentimentalizing it and without depriving it of dignity and importance." Many of Tommy's observations are enchanting because they are truly the thoughts of a child. For example, McPherson gives us a vivid picture of how Tommy perceives the Depression:

> Tommy had always imagined the Depression as a large, gaping black crater below a skyscraper, filled with clothes and furniture, dollar bills, gold jewelry, and a few dead bodies fallen from the building.

Tommy's perceptions are also enlightening, for as Tommy grows and faces new experiences, we are treated to a fresh, often comic view of the facts of life. When Buck, the nephew of the country club's Negro steward, tells Tommy about "the things that men and women do together," illustrating with graphic detail, Tommy is at first fascinated and then repulsed. Finally, after failing to reconcile his image of his parents and their friends with this startling picture, Tommy decided, "maybe only the Negroes do it, maybe only the Negroes."

McPherson's use of imagery is also one of the book's major strengths. Consider, for example, this scene in which Tommy begins to think about the reality of death -- about its meaning -- when his grandmother dies:

> Her life was over. It was a blessing. He thought of her lying now in her lavender dress on the pale silk of her coffin, alone in the darkness of the earth, the rose grasped in her hand. He thought of the soft skin stretched over her cheekbones, and he imagined her eyes behind their closed lids, fixed and straining toward the surface, her face expressionless, her body still, waiting for what he did not know. He thought of the whole vast population of the dead, of all those bodies lying amidst the roots of the trees in the cemetery by the river, composed, quiet, facing the earth above them and the earth the sky, separated from one another by the limitless, embracing soil and from the crushing weight of the world itself by their solitary wooden cases lined with silk. How lonely it seemed, what flimsy protection.

However, McPherson's greatest success is in the ideas he develops. The theme of initiation into a suddenly unfamiliar world touches us all. Tommy's thoughts evoke memories of our own childhood experiences, presenting a universality that is no small achievement by McPherson. And underneath this lies another theme -- American innocence right before the United States entered World War II, a time which foreshadowed the end of this era of security and ideals. Just as we see Tommy's gradual disillusionment, we foresee the disillusionment of the entire country. In the first chapter of the book, which really takes place **after** all of the events in the rest of the book, McPherson tells how the war changed things:

> The war disrupted the easy rhythms of life in Grande Riviere, turning the sleepy old fort with its red brick officers' quarters laid out in a decorous oval around with thousands of soldiers living in Quonset huts, even tents, that sprang up overnight, it seemed, and everywhere -- on (Tommy's) very street, in the fields and the woods he played in, in the place where his favorite hamburger stand used to be.

Throughout the book, McPherson skillfully parallels these two ideas.

McPherson told about the inspiration for his book in an interview with Herbert Mitgang of the **New York Times Book Review:**

> After taking a leave of absence from **The Washington Post** to work on his novel, (McPherson) developed writer's block. "Then one day I had a vision," he recalled. "I saw a scene on a golf course, saw it with clarity and intensity, every leaf on the trees. It wasn't a flashback or a memory but an actual vision. So I just wrote it all down."

And the vision is passed on to us. Through these scenes from childhood, we are transported to another place and time, and we return, like Tommy, with both a painful sense of loss and a heady joy of new-found knowledge. At the end of the summer of Tommy's eighth year, the beginning of the third grade, McPherson leaves us with a final poignant image of Tommy:

> It was exciting to be in the third grade. He knew he wouldn't be eight forever. He passed Mrs. Street's garden; it was prettier in the spring. In the spring he would be nine. That was long time away, but he would grow. He would learn. He'd learned to hit a golf ball. He'd learned a lot of things. And when he was grown, he could change his name. He would be called Andrew. Yes, he would. He straightened his shoulders and walked briskly up the street to school, into the currents of time.

CAROL P. JAMISON

CARMICHAEL LIBRARY AWARD
NONFICTION, DIVISION II

GROWING UP AS A WRITER

As you have seen, I am a writer who comes of a sheltered life. A sheltered life can be a daring life as well. For all serious daring starts from within.

So Eudora Welty concludes her autobiography -- that is, the account of her life as a writer. This is a very fitting conclusion because her recollections are not of extraordinary occurrences. Rather, **One Writer's Beginnings** (Harvard University Press, 1984) gives very private, detailed memories -- both poignant and humorous -- of her life in a close-knit family in Jackson, Mississippi. And with these cherished recollections are revelations that concern her development as one of the South's most famous and beloved writers of fiction. The over-all effect, quietly powerful, is presented in the style for which Miss Welty is so well-known.

Fortunately, **One Writer's Beginnings** is accessible to many readers: it is concise and the diction is simple and direct. In this memoir Miss Welty brings together the most important influences on her career as a writer: the books that she loved, the travels that brought many pleasures, the parents who encouraged this listening, reading child, and the later college years when she made her commitment to becoming a writer.

And to the delight of the reader, Miss Welty even adds a section of personal photographs. The first is of the author, round-cheeked at the age of three, running in black-buckled shoes and carrying her father's watch, a very appropriate detail. "We all of us have been time-minded all our lives," she writes in the opening paragraph, and as we read further, we see that her concern with time has greatly influenced her writing.

Miss Welty also depicts several aspects of life in the South in her growing up. Her fiction, as we all know, captures the essence of life in Mississippi, and this autobiography provides the rich background from which she has drawn so much of her Southern material. Miss Welty's details spring to life as she presents some of the local Jacksonians -- their various personalities and idiosyncracies: the intimidating librarian, the talkative neighbors, and especially the schoolteachers. One example is the teacher in the incident in the elementary school restroom when Eudora and a little friend are discussing, from adjoining cubicles, their plans for the afternoon. When the stern fourth grade teacher overhears one of them using improper grammar and demands that they come out, the two frightened little girls refuse to leave.

> "You might as well tell me," continued Mrs. McWillie. "I'm going to plant myself right here and wait until you come out. Then I'll see who it was I heard saying, 'MIGHT-COULD.' "

The Welty fan, by this incident, will be reminded of the recurring schoolteachers in her works.

Equally vivid are details from the Mississippi countryside. One example is her description of a bottle tree, which Miss Welty's true admirers will recall from her short story, "Livvie":

> Along Mississippi roads you'd now and then see bottle trees; you'd see them alone or in crowds in the frontyard of remote farmhouses. I photographed one of them -- a bare crape myrtle tree with every branch of it ending in the mouth of a colored glass bottle -- a blue Milk of Magnesia or an orange or green pop bottle; reflecting the light, flashing its colors in the sun, it stood as the centerpiece in a little thicket of peach trees.

But most important in this slim memoir is Miss Welty's presentation of the creative process -- an important revelation for the reader who may also be a young writer. "The events in our lives happen in a sequence of time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order," she writes. Dividing her autobiography into three sections, she thereby signals the stages in her own creative development: "Listening," "Learning to See", and "Finding a Voice". Miss Welty is very much aware of the events that have influenced her work, grateful for what came her way in her writing development. For example, when as an ill child she lay in her parents' room and listened to their long conversations in the evenings, she -- at this early age -- was keenly aware of "the secure sense of the hidden

observer" -- so essential to the writer. About learning from a painful childhood experience -- finding out that she had a dead baby brother -- she writes, "The future story writer in the child must have taken unconscious note and stored it away."

Miss Welty shares other personal insights that make this book valuable not only to writers but also to critical readers of fiction. She vividly points out: "If somewhere in its course your work seems to you to have come into a life of its own, and you can stand back from it and leave it be, you are looking then at your subject -- so I feel." Indeed, the whole of **One Writer's Beginnings** exemplifies a recent statement of hers -- a kind of credo: "You show a truth, you don't tell it."

This book should appeal to an even wider audience -- to parents, to those who care for the child when he is young, when he is learning. Miss Welty shares her memories of the books that were an established part of her family and that she cherished as a child. More than once, she pays a loving tribute to her parents for their encouragement and support:

> I live in gratitude to my parents for initiating me --and as early as I begged for it, without keeping me waiting -- into knowledge of the word.

Surely, conscientious parents who read this account will be inspired to read more and more to their little children.

In **One Writer's Beginnings,** Miss Welty has assembled what has been most important to her life as a writer -- her **real** life -- and generously shared it with us. "I think we need to write with love," Miss Welty adds, and indeed, it is her love for the craft, for her parents, and for all those who contributed to her "beginnings" that illuminates this very moving account of her growing up as a writer.